

## The relationship between family and work: tensions, paradigms and directives

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**REC-WP 11/2009**



Working Papers on the Reconciliation of Work and Welfare in Europe

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# **The Relationship between Family and Work: Tensions, Paradigms and Directives**

Trudie Knijn

Arnoud Smit



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## **Abstract**

After decades of promoting the reconciliation of work and family life from a gender-equality perspective, to date discourses and related social policy paradigms replace and reframe the once European agenda on gender-equality and put the gender issue in a much broader policy agenda of new social risks. This working paper first states that a gender-neutral social policy on reconciliation of work and family life stagnates because of four crucial dilemmas. New social policy paradigms have developed since the 1990s, each having particular assumptions on risk-sharing, public and private responsibility and the position of the individual vis-à-vis the state and the community. These paradigms will be analysed in relation to the European Union policies regarding reconciliation of work and family life. We will detect some traces of these paradigms in the Lisbon agreements and its amendments. We will conclude that indeed the gender-equality agenda, as well as family life, has been submitted to the new convention of the competitive knowledge based economy; The social investment paradigm is the most prominent of the three paradigms in this new agenda, however it is mixed up with elements from the other paradigms and therefore current policies agendas lack coherence.

## **Keywords**

New social risks, gender dilemmas, policy paradigms, EU reconciliation policies

## Introduction

*If the traditional, lifetime employment relationship was like a marriage, then the new employment relationship is like a lifetime of divorces and remarriages (Capelli, 2000)*

*As with real marriages, some emerge from the 'divorce' better off than they were before – they might even initiate it. Other fare less well. What they have to offer isn't valued at the moment; they find themselves forced to compete with the younger 'suits' with attributes more highly sought after than theirs. In addition, the 'marriage' itself is not based on equality in the first place. Companies have the upper hand in deciding what the terms are, meaning that break-ups usually favour them more than their erstwhile partners (Hacker, 2006)*

This working paper is about the tensions between work and family life. The quotation above summarises optimally the interrelatedness between fluid family lives and flexible labour markets. Jacob Hacker, Political Science professor at Yale University, analyses in his book *The Great Risk Shift* (2006) the new social risks resulting in job instability and income insecurity, undermining family life both socially and financially. By using the metaphor of marriage and divorce for job insecurity, his analysis links the two main areas of life and analyses their mutual relationship. Divorce influences work life, and losing one's job undermines family life; lack of time for work because of family obligations decreases a person's career chances, income and pension, and lack of time for one's family because of work obligations increases the chances of becoming disconnected from those who could offer comfort, love and bonding. When both areas are unstable and insecure, as they are in the United States nowadays, fear and anxiety are around the corner. This is something not only American citizens are facing today, as Hacker argues, it also threatens Europeans. In this respect too, the USA is of course ahead of Europe: the transformation of the economy, labour market instability and skyrocketing divorce rates were already there in the 1980s and 1990s, sometimes decades before we signalled the same trends in Europe. Still, they appear to transcend European levels, although some European countries show rather similar tendencies.

This notwithstanding, the present study is of great importance for our thoughts on flexible labour markets, human capital in a knowledge-based economy, and policy solutions for dealing with the tensions between work and family life. In the first place, because of this American 'time advantage', Hacker was able to analyse that the risks came not only from labour market and economic transformations and a changing family life, they were deepened by the political responses to it. At the same time that jobs and family life became insecure, American politicians, influenced by neo-liberal economists, propagated what Hacker calls 'The Personal Responsibility Crusade', and succeeded in transforming collective as well as public protection programs into personal saving schemes. Secondly, because the retrenchment of the welfare state by way of privatising work- and health-related risks started decades ago in the 1980s Reagan era, Hacker is now able to study empirically the effects of the system changes that Paul Pierson (1995) already announced. In contrast to Pierson, Hacker does not underestimate these effects. Indeed, he agrees with Pierson that

politicians, for electoral reasons, did not immediately cut public expenses, and if they did, they offered compensation in the form of tax reductions, resulting in similar or even higher public expenses. But in the end – and that is what becomes clear decades after the system changes were implemented – the social effects of a combined instability in work and family relations with a social policy that promotes and implements ‘personal risk awareness’ have been disastrous, in particular for those who had always been protected the best and profited the most from welfare state arrangements: the middle class.

In this paper, traces of Hacker’s *The Great Risk Shift* will be found at different levels. First we share the assumption that we shouldn’t only look at the way family life is complicating women’s participation in work, as is the common signal being broadcasted by almost any EU paper, directive or guideline. In contrast, we opt for a more realistic approach to the influence of changing working patterns and the organisation of work on family life. Second, we share with Hacker the power approach: as in marriage, flexible work relations too imply that some will gain and some will lose when human capital and its keeping up the pace are the only focus in dealing with people. Even though divorce, lone parenthood and job instability rates have not skyrocketed in most European countries to the degree they have in the USA, protection of those who are confronted with these often unexpected life events remains of importance. How do European social policy scholars, sociologists and economists interpret such risks, and what new paradigms for dealing with the relationship between efficiency and social justice are dominant today?

## Reconciling work and family life

Say ‘reconciling work and family life’ and everybody will nod ‘yes, that’s what we need’.

Reconciliation of work and family life is a catchphrase pointing at some urgency, some reflection and in some way an ecological perspective – the whole life perspective – but what does it mean and what does it imply? Dominant paradigms in social policy currently all refer to life courses, to gender – and generational – equality, to active labour markets, social inclusion, social investments in care for the young and the elderly, and to lifelong earning (on the basis of a good primary education). All these good intentions however do not result in agreements on the social policies that should promote them, let alone that agreement is reached at the level of responsible actors (individual versus collective responsibility/the state, the market, the family or the individual citizen). Talking about reconciling work and family life immediately results in a multi-vocal chorus: economists stress efficiency, some sociologists too; other sociologists point at equality, social inclusion and social cohesion; feminist scholars emphasise gender equality; social security experts calculate the sustainability of pensions; and some labour unions are still defending the social protection of the already-included workers.

The focus in this area lies on the tensions resulting between fluidity in family relationships and flexibility of the labour market. Dramatic changes in family forms and relationships have an impact on and are in turn influenced by transformations in



the connections between the labour market, employment and welfare regimes. The widespread entry of women into the labour market – mainly in service industries, be it in full-time, part-time or flexible jobs – influences family life, family incomes and parental obligations. A greater need for two incomes contributes to the polarisation of household incomes. The change in family forms over the last quarter of a century has been dramatic, with low fertility rates, fewer marriages, increased divorce and high rates of extramarital births. In short, men and women nowadays have to cope with greater fluidity in family relationships and a greater flexibility of the labour market. Welfare regimes have not yet found ways to cope with these changes: all that is certain is that assumptions on the existence and desirability of the traditional breadwinner-model family no longer hold.

### **Tensions, themes and topics**

A first task is to map out those tensions that might occur as a result of fluid family lives and flexible labour markets. Figure 1 outlines each of the two pillars contributing to potential tensions separately, and also includes potential risks. Mapping out the tensions that mediate between fluid family lives and labour market flexibility is not so easy, because causality goes two-ways. The explicit focus here is the interrelatedness of these two main areas of life. In contrast to most economists, many social policy scholars and EU politicians do not focus exclusively on how to increase women's labour participation. Though we acknowledge that women's employment is a main instrument in reaching gender equality and are aware of the lack of elasticity of male employment, there are good reasons not to focus only on the hindrances of family life for women's labour participation.

One of these reasons is the increasing pressure of working hours and of flexible and temporary jobs on family life, which is accompanied by income insecurity. Not only is the breadwinner family rapidly disappearing: steady lifelong jobs are also vanishing away, making families confront unexpected periods of either too much or too few work demands. In addition, the issue of women's employment is a rather dispersed and multi-faceted problem in European member states, not so easily reduced to one single strategy or focus. For example, in Scandinavian countries women and men have experienced the blessings of full-time work and now increasingly demand time for leave and part-time work while the children are still young. In the Netherlands and the western part of Germany, female employment rates rise but hardly any mother opts for a full-time job; in France women complain about the transformation of their once full-time jobs into part-time and flexible ones. Finally, the issue of care work in particular and public services in general shows the mutual causality between flexible work patterns and fluid family lives; paid care work is a solution as well as a cause of many tensions between work and family life. Paid care services may solve many of the problems families face in combining work and care, as long as they are of good quality and affordable.

Fluid family lives*	Flexible labour markets*	Social risks	Policy instruments
<b>Partnership</b> - Family formation - Care for children - Divorce/ Widowhood - Care for relatives - Care needs	<b>Entry</b> - Part-time, temporary, flexible jobs - Self-employment - Unemployment - Retirement	<b>Micro:</b> - Income risks - Care deficits - Non-realised fertility - Social exclusion - Decreasing human capital. <b>Macro:</b> - Poverty rates - Decreasing population - Care deficits - Social inequality - Decreasing human capital.	<b>Financial:</b> - Child allowances - Care subsidies and care payments - Subsidised leaves - Tax benefits (reductions/ EITC) - Social Assistance and social security - Education benefits <b>Legal:</b> - Right to child care and leaves - Job protection - Statutory arrangements for leaves, pensions, unemployment, etc. <b>Facilities:</b> - Care provisions - Saving schemes - Activation programmes

**Figure 1:** Social risks following from tensions between fluid families and flexible labour markets

*\* These (work) life events may happen several times during the life course.*

But it is exactly here that we are confronted with economic realities and policy failures: care services belong to the least productive sectors of the economy, hence the efforts to reduce wages, downgrade quality or just opt for a subsidised market of cash payments and/or an informal market of female migrant workers. The interrelatedness between labour market developments and changing family lives is exemplified below:

### Family formation and labour market uncertainty

Family formation might be frustrated by the difficulty accessing steady jobs. Increasingly, young adults only get temporary jobs offering less long-term income security, which means not getting housing loans and being unable to secure a living for a family. Childbearing as well as marriage are rather sensitive to financial instability, which motivates their postponement. A cross-national study in 14 countries showed that labour market uncertainty resulted in large shifts to unmarried

cohabitation ((Mills and Blossfeld, 2005). As Forssén and Ritakallio conclude from a study on first childbirths in 12 European countries, ‘... a logical way to maintain fertility is to support young adults financially and in obtaining permanent jobs, and to improve their housing conditions’ (2006: 176). The reverse also occurs: young adults who have children before finishing their education or becoming established in a secure job will be less available for the labour market, and the income effects during the life course are substantial (Bloemen and Kalwij, 2001).

### **Caring for children and full-time work**

Caring for children might be frustrated due to too rigid demands for full commitment to work. The European Foundation concludes from a 1998 study on working hours that ‘Overtime is widespread among full-time employees [...] only half of those who work overtime are able to take time off in compensation through some form of “time banking” or flexitime work’ (Naegele et al., 2003: 1). In addition, parents – particularly mothers – prefer not to combine a full-time job, which demands indeed the full-time availability of employees, with care for children (Lilja and Hämäläinen, 2001; Naegele et al., 2003). Even the much-celebrated Scandinavian countries have introduced all kinds of legal arrangements and daily-life practices to safeguard ‘family time’. Still, time to care for children is only partly compensated for by paid leaves, and only marginally included in pensions; in addition, a career break for care purposes decreases one’s lifelong income substantially.

### **Flexible work and family time/money**

Flexible work contracts relate to family life both ways. When created at the request of workers, these contracts can optimise the combination of work and family life, but increasingly they only benefit employers while disrupting family life. Short calls, continuously changing working schemes and insecurity about working hours are becoming a real burden for family life, particularly in terms of gender equality. Companies demand too much from their contracted employees, signals the European Foundation (Naegele et al., 2003).

### **Care work as service and source of income**

Care services may help families to reconcile work and family life, and offer employment for low-skilled people – most likely women and, increasingly, migrant women. Despite this, and as a consequence of Baumol’s law, the price of service work is increasingly under pressure. Consequently, the commodification of care work also includes the risk of downsizing wages in the developing service industry, which will first hit the incomes of low-skilled women who need the income most because all sorts of breadwinner facilities are cut down (Knijn and Ostner, 2002).

### Pensions, intergenerational care and life courses

Pensions, especially early retirement schemes, appear to have unforeseen benefits for the family life of employed parents. In countries without sufficient affordable childcare, young grandparents contribute significantly to the care for their employed children's children (Knijn and Liefbroer, 2006; Leira, Tobío and Trifiletti, 2005). Longer working lives will reduce the number of available grandparents within a generation. On the other hand, individualisation of pensions and retirement plans via life-course schemes may increase old-age poverty if no compensations are included for interruptions of the working life – a risk that will harm women more than men (Frericks, 2007; Frericks, Maier and de Graaf, 2006).

Intergenerational care for the elderly turns currently into the recognition of familial production of care and the promotion of 'non-professional health work'. Martin (2004) signals that 'sociability, mutual assistance, relational support and concern on the part of relatives have thus become instrumental in the formulation of public services' (2004: 9). Such a shift is not without consequences for the employment and income protection of relatives that care. Hence the introduction of all kinds of payments for care in almost every European country, albeit rather unevenly distributed among the genders. Moreover, these cash payments for care or personal budgets offer payments and social security that are far below those of real market jobs, therefore bearing new risks for gender equality and family incomes.

### Three policy paradigms

*... work/family reconciliation policies have been promoted as a means of addressing a whole variety of problems from low fertility rates, to improving competitiveness and growth, and achieving gender equality (Lewis, 2006: 423).*

The second aim of this working paper is to review the social policy paradigms that currently dominate the discourse on tensions between work and family life. For decades this has been the area of scholars who studied family life, the labour market and social policies from a gender perspective. Other concerns and commitments have recently entered the arena: declining fertility rates, social protection for the unemployed and the loss of human capital in a highly competitive economy inspire new frameworks for reconsidering work and family life. However, the preferred outcomes or actual risks of the tension between work and family life are far from clear. Indeed, in line with what Jepsen and Pascual (2005) formulate for the European Social Model, the discourse on work and family balance is not only a multi-vocal chorus but a polysemic one. In order to get a grip on this polysemy, in this state-of-the-art paper we evaluate the three current paradigms dominating the discourse: the social investment state, the transitional labour market model and the personal responsibility perspective. Each of these paradigms will be analysed by focusing on their policy theory, that is, their assumptions on the link between social policy and preferred outcomes. These assumptions represent three *rationales* not only for thinking about how to solve current tensions between work and family life, they also offer *instruments* or social policy measures that should solve the tensions. It will

not come as a surprise that these social policy paradigms are more or less identified as the social democratic, the corporatist and the (neo)liberal way out.

In her analysis of the framing of EU policies on the issue since the 1957 Treaty of Rome, in which equal payment for men and women became an acknowledged objective, Lewis (2006) comes to the conclusion that work/family reconciliation policies moved away from their clear orientation toward equal-opportunity policies to being an instrument of the economic-growth agenda. In particular, the lack of recognition for care work and its equal sharing, as well as the uncontested employment of men, have contributed to this shift of meaning; the instrumental approach gained prevalence by levelling out the right to give and receive care as well as the de-gendering of care as lower-order priorities.

This process can be analysed by evaluating the framing of social policy at the EU level, as Lewis did, or by examining influential social policy paradigms that dominate current discourse and will influence future framing of EU-level policy. In selecting these paradigms we use the criterion that such paradigms not only probe and evaluate current policies, but offer more or less consistent proposals for system changes that affect both family life and employment.

The original feminist analyses of the tensions between work and family life have contributed to the understanding as well as the critique of the still-prevailing gender inequality and its normative assumptions during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond in the EU member states (Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Ostner and Lewis, 1995). Feminist scholars have also contributed to framing social policy and its assumptions at the EU-level and the cross-national analysis of institutional arrangements in member states (Bettio et al., 1998; Lilja and Hämäläinen, 2001; Millar and Warman, 1996; Naeyegele et al., 2003; Plantenga, Remery and Helming, 2005; Saraceno, 2004), as well as commented on the Lisbon agenda (Lewis, 2006; Fagan, Grimshaw & Rubery, 2006; Annesley, 2007). Attempts have also been made to develop a framework based on normative assumptions (participation, the right to give and receive care) for social policy development. However, such a framework was never developed fully, probably because complexities interfered with a straightforward policy programme:

1. The Wollstonecraft dilemma; both identification with men's lives and valuation of (certain aspects of) women's lives have obvious disadvantages; women have to defer either parenthood or a good income (Pateman, 1989);
2. The dilemma of 'free choice' (individual preference) versus macro-level goods. The first will benefit well-educated women (and men) but can take place at the cost of lower-skilled women, for instance migrants who are vulnerable because of their illegal status. Still, macro-level goods, such as full labour participation, tend not to be what lower-skilled women (or men) opt for (Hakim, 2000);
3. Awareness of the complicated relationship between gender equality and intergenerational equality at the micro- and macro-levels. Micro-level dilemmas are related to either caring for elderly relatives or being employed. Macro-level choices have to be made in the process of redistributing budgets between the generations (Knijn and Komter, 2004);

4. Awareness of the limited influence of social policy on individual men's behaviour (needed for equal participation in family life and care) under a welfare capitalist regime with strong market pulls for employment (Hobson and Morgan, 2002).

Interestingly, in the late 1990s new actors took the floor and showed less hesitation when presenting a new paradigmatic proposal for solving the tension between work and family life. At the request of Vandenbroucke, the then Belgian Minister for Social Affairs and Pensions Gösta Esping-Andersen (2002) commented on the 'familialism' of Continental welfare states, the unequal participation of and opportunities for women and men, the old and the young. Here both axes of family relationships (gender and generations) as well as public and private responsibilities came together in a new framework for Europe's social policy: the social investment state. A second, more or less related, social policy paradigm developing in the late 1990s focuses more on labour market flexibility than on welfare states' family policy, though again both sides of our 'tension' are included. The transitional labour market model of Günther Schmid (Schmid, 2003; 2006) analyses new risks related to labour market transitions and at the same time offers a framework for risk management that refers to – but does not prioritise – family-related employment risks. Finally, a third social policy paradigm came to the fore, opting for quite a radical change from collective to individual arrangements in order to guarantee efficient transitions between employment on the one hand and education, early retirement and family life on the other, without reaching excessive public costs. This model, the life-course approach, was introduced by Lans Bovenberg (2005), who proposed optimising the efficient use of human capital by introducing private savings schemes for those periods in which workers need 'time out', be it to update their skills, take care of their children or avoid burn-out. If no such events occur during the working life, workers can use the savings scheme for early retirement.

On the surface, these predominant social policy paradigms have a lot in common. First there is a shared language of *new social risks* (Esping-Andersen, 1999; 2002; Giddens, 1998; Schmid, 2003; 2006) following from both fluidity in family life and flexibility of the labour market. Second, all social policy paradigms refer to the *life course* as a dynamic basis for considering these risks (Bovenberg, 2005; Frericks, Maier and de Graaf, 2006; Schmid, 2003; Van der Lippe et al., 2007). Assuming that at the micro-level individuals are embedded in various family obligations and risks (caring for the young and the elderly, divorce and separation), and – partly in relation to family life – have unstable employment patterns (part-time or temporary jobs, periods of unemployment and education), such a life-course perspective offers a framework to deal with such dynamics. At the macro-level this perspective offers a scope to solve intergenerational and gender inequality. The third common issue is *human capital*, representing the idea that in the context of the knowledge-based economy, lifelong learning is a condition sine qua non. The assumption is that social exclusion can be largely attributed to a lack of appropriate qualifications, which is increasingly the case for older and/or low-skilled workers and for women who stay out of the labour market for too long. This brings us to the fourth shared assumption, which is *re-commodification* (Esping-Andersen, 2002; Gauthier, 2005; Knijn

and Ostner, 2002). In the light of demographic trends, but also to cut down the costs of non-participation (breadwinner compensations, long-term social assistance and benefits), since the 1980s welfare states have aimed at an 'all hands on deck' policy.

It would be a mistake to assume that the analysis of the current tensions in the labour market in relation to changing family life on the basis of these four concepts – new social risks, life-course perspective, making human capital central and re-commodification – results in a consensual social policy program. That this is not the case is indeed due to the polysemic discourse on what exactly these new risks are, how the life course is defined, what a life-course approach implies, and how the conditions for re-commodification should be understood. Also of importance – and this relates directly to our theme of the tensions between work and family life – is what is meant by the risks of today's family life and what options for reconciling work and family life are suggested.

Esping-Andersen (2002) is quite clear on what new social risks are: social exclusion and social inequality, the wasting of human capital, family and child poverty, gender inequality and overly low fertility rates. His overview includes all potential tensions between work and family life. Children's poverty increases among other things due to parental divorce and low participation rates of low-skilled mothers and fathers; social exclusion represents the gap between insiders and outsiders in the labour market; and low fertility rates, in contrast to a few decades ago, relates to women's exclusion from the labour market as well as job insecurity of young adults (Castles, 2003). More or less the same approach on new social risks can be found in the work of Schmid. Stating that full employment in full-time and continuous jobs is something of the past while at the same time more and more women enter the labour market, the new social risk is that increasing labour market flexibility leads to permanent exclusion of new 'social minorities' (Schmid and Schömann, 2004). Women are defined as such a new social minority because of their still-greater commitment to family life and unpaid care work. Interestingly, both Esping-Andersen and Schmid plea for risk-sharing by way of respectively public or collective arrangements. In contrast, the Dutch economist Bovenberg, a very influential figure in the development of the transformation of the Dutch welfare state, pleads for shifting from the current intergenerational contract into personal risk management: 'The implicit income insurance provided by the intergenerational social contract harms the incentives to accumulate human capital, supply labour, and form stable personal relationships' (Bovenberg, 2005: 404). Instead, Bovenberg proposes longer working lives, more individual responsibility for financing periods of (part-time) leave by way of 'tax-favoured saving accounts for financing (part-time) parental leave [that] can supplement minimum public income provisions (such as child and child care benefits and publicly financed parental leave schemes)' (Ibid.: 416). In addition, such tax-favoured personal saving accounts can substitute collective or public (early) retirement funds, and can be added up to short-term minimum unemployment benefits that should replace long-duration earnings-related unemployment benefits. If made mandatory, such individual accounts can even form the basis of social security and 'be viewed as a self-insurance device against human capital risk over the life cycle' (Ibid.: 417).

An interesting preliminary conclusion is that both Esping-Andersen and Schmid present strategies that are in line with the path dependency of the welfare states they represent. Although Esping-Andersen (2002) sees a role in welfare production for the market and the family, it is in his vision the ultimate role of the state to guarantee a redistributive 'social contract' that reflects some form of collective solidarity. This is not only a matter of social justice but also a still-popular assumption of the people of Europe. Schmid, like Esping-Andersen, refers to principles of justice to share the risks of unemployability in such a way that new social risks – resulting from self-employment, temporary work and family life – could be minimised. More than Esping-Andersen, Schmid (2006) stresses the role of social partners, coalitions and collectivities in risk management, reflecting the corporate character of 'his' German welfare state. Bovenberg (2005), in contrast, opts for a more radical turn in 'his' welfare state, the Netherlands, on all domains. In his plea for personal responsibility by individualising social security, he strongly deviates from the collectively, publicly shared and redistributive protection system that once characterised (and in some areas still does) the Dutch welfare state. In addition to what Bovenberg calls 'a self-insurance device against human capital risk over the life cycle' (Ibid.: 417), public compensation could be offered to the poor, such as in-work-benefits for low-skilled women on social assistance and early intervention for dysfunctional families.

We now can summarise the objectives, or preferred outcomes, of the three distinctive social policy paradigms. The *social investment state paradigm* represents the social democratic welfare state, but changes it in such a way that public investments should focus on the accommodation of human capital, avoidance of poverty – particularly among children – and the accommodation of women's re-commodification through public investments in care services. The *transitional labour market model* represents the corporatist welfare state by its focus on institutional frameworks and collective agreements, but it also changes its direction. It acknowledges that corporatist welfare failed to activate not only those who were excluded but also those included in the work protection systems, and recognises that new social risks related to the new flexible labour market and the demands of family life have not been covered well by 'old corporatism' – hence it demands institutional frameworks that help people develop their capabilities. Finally, the *private responsibility approach* reflects the liberal welfare state in which people should equip themselves for the market, and which relies on self-insurance for those periods of the life cycle in which one is temporarily excluded, for example because of a decision not to participate fully due to family or care responsibilities (see also Gauthier, 2005).

*Risk-sharing* is thus a main theme for both analysing and evaluating the tensions between work and family life, as Schmid (2006) recognises. Referring to Rawls (1990; 2001), Dworkin (2000) and Sen (2001), he argues that the extent of risk-sharing depends on whether risks are triggered or caused by individual choice or external circumstances and whether the consequences of risks can be borne individually or exceed an individual's capacity, and should therefore be managed collectively (Schmid, 2006: 21). He distinguishes four ideal types of labour market-related social risk management: individual responsibility, solidarity, individual solidarity and



collective solidarity. Interestingly, this model does not refer to social risks related to family life, which raises questions as to whether we could apply the same line of reasoning to the tensions between work and family life. Should we envision the social risks related to these tensions as individual choices (withdrawing from the labour market to raise children) or as the consequence of external circumstances (lack of childcare capacity or social norms)? And what are the criteria to decide whether the consequences of the risks – assuming that having children is a risk – can be borne individually? Is poverty a criterion here, or the gap in the purchasable income between couples with and without children (see Bradshaw and Finch, 2002)?

At least the risk-sharing approach creates ways for a more dynamic perspective on the tensions between work and family life, and we will apply that perspective on the four main themes that are shared by the currently dominant social policy paradigms: new social risks, life-course perspective, making human capital central and re-commodification.

*New social risks* include the risks of the flexible labour market and of fluid families, and relate mainly to the relationship between two increasingly unstable institutions. The implication is that we will have to take both sides of the spectrum into account. For example, in studying childcare provisions we should not only calculate if there are enough provisions to support or stimulate women's employment: also wages, working conditions and working times for care workers (often women) should be studied as well as the risky position of informal care workers – often migrants. When focusing on the role of companies in balancing work and family life we will have to include not only their part of the risk-sharing support but also their risk-stimulating role. Offering paid parental leave to core workers has less meaning when at the same time the share of temporary workers is rapidly increasing. The principle of risk-sharing may offer us a lens to analyse both sides of the spectrum; outsourcing childcare might improve efficiency and even quantity of provisions, but what risks are involved for those working in these sectors (mainly women, who bear these risks) if welfare states outsource childcare or marketise home care? Assessment of both sides of the relationship between work and family life will help us to evaluate the consequences of current transformations of European welfare states.

The *life-course perspective* offers opportunities to analyse risks and tensions in the relationship between fluid family relations and a flexible labour market during the life course. It also bears the risk of reification; if transformed into a new standard, it might deviate too much from real lives, so instead of offering new security or more equality (between men and women, low- and high-skilled workers) it will result in criteria that many workers cannot meet (Frericks, Maier and de Graaf, 2006). Lewis (2004) points at that risk by describing the tendency towards the adult-worker model. The life-course perspective is already under critique because it starts from an atomised perspective, based upon the thesis of individualisation and focusing on individual life courses only. Another reason is the assumption that individual lives are 'makeable'. Commenting on both assumptions, Liefbroer (2007) suggests that we could gain by looking at life courses from the perspective of *linked lives* (Elder, 1994) and analyse how people deal with the discrepancy between the ideology of makeable

life courses and a social reality that is less makeable. Liefbroer's suggestion to study individuals' ways of coping with such a discrepancy according to Merton's (1968) classification of it might be of importance; do European citizens react conformistally, innovatively, ritualistically, by withdrawing or rebelliously in reaction to the macro-economically- and/or social policy-inspired changes in the labour market and family life?

This brings us to the third theme: the *human capital approach* stresses that individual workers are increasingly supposed to take responsibility for their employability. Self-investment is the new credo for workers in the knowledge-based economy, and not without cause. Technical innovation of work processes as well as managerial innovations of organisations demand lifelong learning to prevent workers from becoming obsolete. However, as Hobson and Fahlen (2009) argue, along with Nussbaum (2000; 2003), Lewis and Guillari (2005) and Schmid (2006), the human capital approach – like the life-course perspective – is assuming too much of an atomised individual. For analytical and evaluative reasons, Sens (2001) alternative notion of capabilities offers a more embedded perspective on the relationship between work and family life. Social obligations towards relatives and significant others restrict workers' autonomy and chances to invest in human capital, more so when it concerns women. The opposite should not be ignored either: reciprocity in caring tasks, the capability to share parenthood and develop caring skills is rather restricted by work life, especially for men.

The capabilities approach may also be helpful when studying inequalities between children, an argument which is rightfully stressed by Esping-Andersen (2002). Fluid families and flexible labour markets under the condition of both a knowledge-based economy and an increasing migrant population in corporatist welfare states bear the risk of social exclusion for huge numbers of children and adolescents, because such welfare states tend to behave rather reluctantly towards including newcomers. Studying the tensions between work and family life from the perspective of capabilities will demand inclusion of the effects for children and the investments in their future. How do poverty, school drop-outs, working in temporary low-pay jobs relate to changing labour markets, gender inequality and social policies in the various European countries?

*Re-commodification* is the current tendency in all European welfare states. After decades of de-commodification, welfare states have reached the limits of social protection and social security. The process of re-commodification is shaped in both work and care. Activation policies are introduced according to the Scandinavian model of re-integrating those on social benefits through training or work as soon as possible. This does not mean that in non-Scandinavian countries, or even in all Scandinavian countries, the activation programs are successful, efficient or even socially and politically acceptable (van Berkel and Hornemann, 2002). Nevertheless, a tendency towards individualisation of social security and reduction of tax benefits for early retirement, a shift towards companies' responsibilities for sick employees, etc. all point in the direction of decreasing public social protection and increasing collective and/or private social security. Whether this benefits families because it

reduces poverty by increasing employment or puts families at risk of poverty due to less protection remains to be seen. Moreover, the risks will not be distributed equally because not every citizen, worker or family member will be able to cope with them.

In the care domain, re-commodification is without precedence and goes far beyond the numbers of the unprotected domestic workers and household personnel that replaced family members in the higher echelons of our societies in the early 20th century. Moreover, the diversity of commodified care workers exceeds the imagination, varying from well-paid professional pedagogues in Scandinavian childcare centres to underpaid care workers performing their familial obligation on the basis of cash-for-care vouchers and illegal migrant care workers in Ireland, Italy, Spain and Austria. Hence the analysis of the tensions between work and family life should take into account the perspective of *inclusive citizenship* (Knijn and Kremer, 1997). This concept encompasses citizens' right to give as well as receive care during the life course as wage workers, including those who provide paid care work. As Knijn and Ostner have brought to the fore: 'the current reshuffling of care work does not offer a clear-cut and consistent picture from the perspective of commodification and de-commodification. Care is shifted from the family to the state, from the state to the market, and from there to the family and vice versa [...] one common characteristic is the increasing commodification of care work without proper de-commodifying benefits. There seems to be one exception to this rule, namely in the form of work-related care rights' (2002: 161).

## Conclusions

Given the complex interrelatedness between flexible labour markets and fluid family lives, the dynamics of the life course and the fact that citizens should not be understood as atomised individuals nor as managing directors of makeable individual lives, and the macro-economic needs for re-commodification versus the micro-economic needs for income protection and the right to give and receive care, we suggest using dynamic concepts generously in the analysis of the tension between work and family life.

In the first part of this paper we formulated some suggestions for (combining) such concepts. Instead of pleading for one ideal analytical model or a 'one size fits all' schedule, analysts of the tension between work and family life should be aware of and study the multi-system and multi-actor way through which most Europeans reconcile work and family life. Focusing on these tensions from the perspective of *risk-sharing*, *linked lives*, *capabilities* and *inclusive citizenship* might offer an analytical framework and a roadmap to get a better grip on the interrelatedness between flexible labour markets and fluid family lives during the life course. In a comparative case study of the way Dutch, German and Swedish mothers deal with this tension, Knijn, Jönsson and Klammer (2005) showed that European women and men juggle a combination of public provisions, legal regulations, kin relations and company services to balance work and family life. We have introduced the term *care packages*, paraphrasing Rein and Rainwaters' (1980) *income packages* to describe the combination of resources that women use to overcome the tension. What we did not analyse at

that time is what this means for those offering those services – the paid care workers, including their way of dealing with these tensions.

## **EU social policy assumptions**

### **Work first?**

The third and final aim of this working paper is to present a preliminary review of EU social policy. In this part of the paper we will present an overview of EU guidelines, directives and policy instruments that are in effect until 2008 as well as an evaluation of the development of its assumptions by looking at how tensions between work and family are presented. The European Commission paper on modernising social protection (Commission of the European Communities, 2003d) has already outlined two aims of public support for the reconciliation of work and family life: to help families perform tasks which are fundamental to society and to make it easier for men and women to perform their family responsibilities while being active in the labour market. The policies proposed under these headings all aim at the labour market integration of parents; hardly any attention is paid to labour market obstacles for family relationships, which is quite remarkable given the aims formulated (see also Lewis, 2006). The main fear of the commission in this report is to avoid any support for families that might have adverse effects on employment. It therefore advises not paying family supplements for children or dependent spouses, not paying means-tested benefits on the basis of family income, and avoiding long duration of benefit dependency among lone parent households and long maternal leaves. Instead, affordable childcare and short-term care leaves are promoted.

Typically the reconciliation policy has a one-sided lens by only evaluating obstacles for increasing labour market participation. Any sign of awareness of an opposite causality is lacking. In this paper we have looked at both sides – which tensions in the relationship between work and family life have negative effects on both life aspects. Examples of this two-way approach are issues such as the influence of the increasing flexibility and temporariness of jobs on family formation, the privatisation and commercialisation of care services on the quality of children's education and care for elderly, the individualisation of social security on families' income, and the increasing work mobility on divorce rates. Implicit in the commission text is also the assumption on what gender equality means. According to Lewis (2006), gender equality has been a main objective of the EU for decades (and indeed many member states have introduced a gender-equality policy thanks to the EU), but nowadays the concept is used more and more instrumentally – the assumption being that gender equality can only be reached on men's terms. The adult worker model, a citizen who is liberated from caring and familial obligations seems to have become the commission's norm. Phrased in the terms of the commission, public policy should take account of workers who experience 'possible disruptions related to family life', which is indeed more than workers in 1800 or 1900 could expect. It denies possible disruptions of family life related to work demands, which

needs our attention too, since neither economic nor labour market demands are God-given entities that we will have to face without critical evaluation.

In the next section we will present the methodology used to review EU social policy and delineate our field of study. We will briefly address the policies and instruments within the framework of the Open Method of Coordination, then look at the tensions we identified in figure 1 and how these tensions are addressed in EU policy documents. We finish with the assumptions that underlie the reviewed social policy documents.

### Methodology

For this working paper we deemed it necessary to not only describe EU policies and communications and the tensions related to them, but also to gain insight into the assumptions that underlie these policies. We used the policy-scientific approach as described by Leeuw (2003) as the basis for our analysis, to ensure a thorough and consistent review. The approach consists of several steps and can be used to reconstruct program theories by analysing interviews and formal and informal documents. We have analysed formal EU documents and slightly altered the policy-scientific approach to fulfil our needs. The first step was to identify the problems addressed in the documents. The next steps were to identify arguments that are brought forward to solve the problems (why is it a problem and should it be solved); to identify instruments brought forward to solve the problem; to formulate propositions that link the instruments and arguments to the problems to be solved (do the arguments and instruments logically lead to achieving the goals or desired outcomes; what are the assumptions for solving the problems); and lastly, to identify tensions between flexible labour markets and fluid family life, mentioned in the documents either implicitly or explicitly.

We have applied this approach to formal EU documents. These are EU directives, resolutions, regulations decisions and treaties (draft or final); communications of the European Commission, European Council and European Parliament; and advisory committees' opinions and background reports and analyses. In short: Such documents are published by –or by order of – any of the EU institutions. Obviously, not all documents published by the EU were analysed. Relevant policies and communications were identified by an inductive literature review on reconciliation and a search of the EU registers on reconciliation. These documents were used as a starting point for analysis, and the documents they referred to were also analysed when relevant to our study. A further delineation is that we have focused on the documents that are part of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Employment and the OMC on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, and the preparatory and evaluation documents that are published for these OMCs. Although we have analysed documents that were referred to in these OMCs, we cannot guarantee our analysis to be fully complete, since these OMCs became operative rather recently (Employment in 1997, Social Protection and Social Inclusion in 2000). The appendix will provide an overview of all the documents analysed.

## Policies and instruments

The policies and instruments relevant to this paper are implemented in the OMC. The OMC can be applied to different kinds of international policy, but for the EU the OMC was introduced in the Amsterdam Treaty (European Union, 1997) and for the first time implemented in the European Employment Strategy (EES), although not under the name of OMC (see Schäfer, 2006). It is now in use for both this EES and for policies for Social Inclusion. For a review on the instrument of OMC see (Schäfer, 2006; Van der Vleuten and Verloo, 2006; Vanderbroucke, 2002; Zeitlin and Pochet, 2005).

OMC is a means of governance that should promote mutual learning and policy exchanges (Vanderbroucke, 2002) and works with peer pressure and benchmarking (High Level Group, 2004a). This is achieved by using a cycle in which the common targets of the policies are set at European Council meetings, Guidelines and policies are developed and instruments proposed, and these have to be incorporated into National Action Plans. Initially the targets and Guidelines were set each year, but since 2005 they are set for a three-year period. For Social Inclusion the targets were set for a two-year period (Council of the European Union, 2000f). Each year the progress of implementation of these guidelines and policies at the national level are monitored with the help of indicators and best practices identified in a Joint Employment Report (JER, since 1998) or a Joint Report on Social Inclusion (since 2002). The OMC gives clear directions for member states on what to change or implement in order to reach the commonly agreed objectives. The member states are however relatively free to do what they want with these objectives, e.g. if they state in their National Action Plan that a reform of the tax systems is on the way, they can leave it at that. The OMC works with 'naming and shaming' (Van der Vleuten and Verloo, 2006) and for most guidelines and policies the EU has no way of enforcing cooperation. If a member state does not mind being seen as a laggard in implementing guidelines, it can get away with it. It is for this reason that the High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok conclude in their report 'Facing the Challenge: The Lisbon strategy for growth and employment' that: 'The open method of coordination has fallen short of expectations. If Member States do not enter the spirit of mutual benchmarking, little or nothing happens' (High Level Group, 2004a: 42). However, they also conclude that the community method has not delivered either, and thus call for a radical simplification of the process. In 2003 the Commission already decided to streamline the OMC for social protection and inclusion policies in order to align the OMC with the Lisbon Strategy (Commission of the European Communities, 2003f). In 2005 the Commission presented a new framework for the OMC for social protection and inclusion policies with new common objectives. The renewed OMC is supposed to operate parallel to and in interaction with the Lisbon Strategy. The Lisbon Strategy was re-launched in 2005 (Commission of the European Communities, 2005b) and the OMC for this Strategy (the EES) was also adapted. Use of the OMC to achieve the common objectives for the EU shows that even though these objectives – including Lisbon – are commonly agreed upon, member states diverge in their implementation. Since little 'hard' – enforceable – regulation is possible on issues of employment and social policy, the

EU is left with persuasion as its major tool. It is thus up to the member states to decide if they really want to implement the reforms of their labour market policies, and tax and benefit systems. This is not to say that member states do not implement the requested reforms or policies, but they tend to take more time than the EU wishes.

### **Tensions between fluid families and flexible labour markets**

With regard to employment rates and the overall goals of full employment – put on the spotlight since the Lisbon conference (Council of the European Union, 2000e) – the connection between employment rates and family life responsibilities has been brought forward quite explicitly. In most cases the tensions are addressed more implicitly though: no real problem definitions are given, but the tensions can be distilled out of the goals set or instruments used. As we want to show the importance of the tensions for reconciliation, we try to address these more systematically by relating events in an average life course to the dynamics and problems – the tensions – emerging out of a more flexible labour market.

#### **Family fluidity**

##### *Partnership formation, divorce and widowhood*

Partnership formation is more or less ignored in EU documents; the documents analysed address only more formal relationships, such as marriage. Being married can influence eligibility for different benefits, e.g. by lowering unemployment benefits. The consequences can then be twofold: the lower benefit can either serve as an incentive to get back on the labour market, or it can enhance dependency on the partner – and a possible increase in gender inequality – and actually be a disincentive for labour market reintegration.

Divorce can be a bigger problem: the majority of single-parent households are at or below poverty levels (Commission of the European Communities, 2003d: 12) in 85% of cases the household is headed by a woman, and the risk of poverty is high for women over 65 (EESC, 2006: 176). Depending on the state of social security, educational level, and the facilities and affordability of childcare, single parents can easily get trapped in a poverty and/or inactivity gap: some social services are usually provided for the unemployed, but upon re-entering the labour market these provisions will have to be paid for again. When the prices for these services are high, this can mean that the disposable income when employed, after paying for the services, is actually lower than the disposable income when unemployed. It is easy to understand how this can be a major disincentive for returning to the labour market. Although these poverty and inactivity traps can also affect other households, they affect single-parent households more often (Commission of the European Communities, 2003d). Since 2001, the European Employment Strategy Guidelines have specifically aimed at removing the poverty traps by suggesting tax and benefit systems reform where necessary (Council of the European Union, 2001a; 2002a), and in 2003 the removal of unemployment and inactivity traps were added as a goal of the guidelines (Council of the European Union, 2003a; 2005a)<sup>1</sup>. Widowhood is a special and hardly-mentioned tension. Depending on the age one becomes widowed,

we can think of several tensions related to it – apart from the emotional and physical reaction widowhood by itself might provoke. If one becomes widowed at an early age there might be young children involved, triggering an even greater need for reconciliation of professional and family life. Being a housewife or the widow of a pensioner might lead to more dependency on benefit systems. However, in the analysed documents so far we found no references to widowhood, except for the 2002 Joint Report on adequate and sustainable pensions (Commission of the European Communities, 2002a), which mentions widowhood in relation to the lower income women over 65 have when they become widowed and do not have a full pension.

#### *Family formation and Childcare*

Low fertility rates in the EU are considered to be a major problem. In the Green Paper on demographic change it is stated that there has never been economic growth without population growth, and that the average number of children born in Europe is lower than the number of children that people would want (Commission of the European Communities, 2005a). Being able to form a family and have the desired number of children is therefore a major issue in EU documents (e.g. Commission of the European Communities, 2005a; 2006d), and is also cause of concern for the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2004). The tensions related to balancing work and family life is one reason for the low fertility rates, but the Green paper mentions other reasons: 'late access to employment, job instability, expensive housing and lack of incentives (family benefits, parental leave, child care, equal pay)' (Commission of the European Communities, 2005a: 5). With regard to reconciliation, several EU documents refer to fertility and the organisation of labour and the labour market; the existence and level of maternal, paternal and parental leave schemes; and the existence, quality and affordability of childcare facilities (Commission of the European Communities, 2006b; Council of the European Union, 1992; 1996; 2002b). Gender equality is also mentioned in this respect, since it is still mainly women who will take primary responsibility for childcare and who are also the most likely (in statistical terms) to break their career for a shorter or longer period – not to mention pregnancy and childbirth (Commission of the European Communities, 2003a; 2006d; Council of the European Union, 2006c). A career break, even in the form of a long-term parental leave, can bring several risks for labour market participation later in life, as well as implications for pension and retirement. It is here that the tensions of reconciling work and family life are most poignant. This is recognised in several EU documents, especially in the Employment Guidelines (e.g. Council of the European Union, 2003a; but also in: Commission of the European Communities, 2006d). The risks related to long-term parental leave lie mainly in skills level becoming outdated. This can be overcome by training upon re-entry, but as several Employment Guidelines state, access to relevant training or education can be difficult, especially for women. Member states are therefore urged to take measures to ensure access (Council of the European Union, 1998; 1999c; 2000a; 2001a; 2002a; 2003a; 2005a). The 2003 report on Social Inclusion (Commission of the European Communities, 2003c) refers to the national action plans that member states have developed, and conclude that all member states



recognise the importance of combining work and family life for family formation as well as –next to family support – preventing social exclusion of women, single parents and large families (Commission of the European Communities, 2003c: 94–95).

The availability, quality and affordability of childcare are also directly related at reconciling work and family life. There is a very clear tension between responsibilities for children and work, and childcare facilities could make reconciliation easier to achieve. To this end, in 1992 the European Council recommended that member states launch initiatives aimed at reconciliation in the form of childcare facilities (Council of the European Union, 1992). In 1996, reconciliation (and quest for equal opportunities) was given support by the Council Directive (Council of the European Union, 1996), obliging member states to implement a framework ‘on parental leave and time of work on grounds of force majeure’ developed by the European social partners. With regard to flexibility of the labour market, the 1992 childcare recommendation explicitly included informal facilities, as well as environment, structure and organisation of work as important means to help reconcile responsibilities. The 1996 directive also addressed explicitly the need for parents to be able to take time off on grounds of force majeure, to care for family members in case of acute illness or accidents (Council of the European Union, 1996, clause 3). We can thus state that at that time reconciliation addressed both the importance of female employment rates and of equal sharing of responsibilities for upbringing and family life. The 2000 EC Resolution on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life (Council of the European Union, 2000b) supports this statement, and specifically encourages members states to take action so that men can take more responsibilities. More recently however this attention for equal sharing has slightly decreased: in the Employment Guidelines and other documents concerned with employment, participation and the general Lisbon goals, the emphasis on reconciliation is put more on women’s employment rates and less on men taking responsibilities for family life as a goal in itself (Commission of the European Communities, 2003b; Council of the European Union, 2006b; see also: Lewis, 2006). In addition, the common objectives for Social Protection and Social inclusion refer to reconciliation within the bounds of access to and quality of employment (Council of the European Union, 2000c; 2002c). The documents concerned with equal opportunities and the Joint reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, on the other hand, refer to reconciliation more in terms of gender equality and family solidarity (e.g. Commission of the European Communities, 2003c; 2006d; Council of the European Union, 2006b; EESC, 2006). Although the employment and participation argument is never far away, there seems to be a more intrinsic motivation for equal sharing of responsibilities instead of the more utilitarian view found within the Lisbon-related documents. This rift can be discarded as an academic one, because most EU documents in which reconciliation has emerged since the Lisbon council pay tribute to the goals of this council. Nevertheless, it can serve as an example for Lewis’ statement that gender equality can only be reached on men’s terms (see above pp 12–13).

*Care for relatives*

It is not only children who need care. With an aging population, the number of people that potentially need care rises. For a long time, care services for the elderly were provided for informally: family, neighbours and other community members helped when necessary. In recent decades, depending on the country, there has been a shift towards a more formal care in the form of institutions in which the care-dependent elderly are housed and nurtured. Next to the elderly, people may have to deal with other care-dependent relatives: either temporarily when people are sick or injured, or more permanently when there is a chronic condition. The burden of care once again falls mainly upon women (Commission of the European Communities, 1998). EU documents focus less however on care for relatives than on care for children. The abovementioned directives (Council of the European Union, 1992; 1996) specifically aim at childcare and parental leave; care for relatives is not included here, although it is included in the resolution on balanced participation of women and men in family and working life (Council of the European Union, 2000b) in which member states are called upon to review and if possible protect the rights of men and women who want to balance work and family life (clause 2b ii), and to encourage balanced sharing of care (clause 2b iii). Care for relatives is also included in the EES Guidelines from day one (Council of the European Union, 1998; 1999c; 2000a; 2001a; 2002a; 2003a; 2005a), although here care for relatives is referred to as 'other dependent persons' and is only aimed at 'providing care services for children and other dependents'. In its opinion on the Commission Communication on Making Work Pay (Commission of the European Communities, 2003d) the European Economic and Social Committee concludes that not only financial incentives in benefits and pensions systems, but also 'child care and special provisions for disabled people, education and public health assets' could contribute to making work pay (EESC, 2004: 87). This confirms that care for relatives can be an important barrier for reconciling work and private life, and is acknowledged by the High Level Group advise on the Lisbon Strategy (High Level Group, 2004a). In the Joint reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion care for relatives it is put under the family solidarity heading and refers directly to care for the elderly. According to the Joint report of 12 December 2003 (Commission of the European Communities, 2003c: 86), member states perceive the need to formalise care to support (and not replace) the role of families. The report also states that most member states have a care leave and/or care allowance system to make it possible to care for the elderly in the family home. In reports on equal opportunities, the Commission also notices that although the level of activities in the field of reconciliation was encouraging and there was progress in childcare, little progress has been made in developing care infrastructure for the elderly (Commission of the European Communities, 2001a: 18; 2003c: 9; see also the later reports on equality in the appendix). We can thus conclude that although tensions regarding care for relatives are mentioned only implicitly, and mainly under 'other dependents', the EU does encourage member states to take action on reconciling work and care responsibilities.

### Labour Market

The tensions related to work and labour market flexibility surface mainly in the OMC for the European Employment Strategy (EES), consisting of communications, European Employment Strategy Guidelines, Joint Employment Reports, and National Action Plans. Since the Treaty of Amsterdam (European Union, 1997), the Luxembourg Job Summit (Council of the European Union, 1997b) and the Lisbon Council (Council of the European Union, 2000e), employment has been put at the heart of EU policies and strategies. Employment (and increasing productivity) is the main solution for economic problems in EU member states, the emerging problems being due to demographic challenges (affordability of pensions and welfare states) and the best way to help people out of and prevent poverty and social exclusion (Commission of the European Communities, 2005b; Council of the European Union, 2000e; High Level Group, 2004a). This is probably why reconciliation and equal opportunities have been put under the heading of employment and there has been a call for more active employment policies in member states (Commission of the European Communities, 2003d; Council of the European Union, 1998; 1999c; 2000a; 2001a; 2002a; 2003a; 2005a). Since the end of 1997, the European Employment Strategy (EES) Guidelines are used as an instrument to achieve higher participation rates, and together with the Joint Employment Reports and the National Action Plans (NAP) were the first OMC to be used in the EU (Schäfer, 2006). Employment and participation are presented as a panacea to the main EU problems, hence the ambitions for the EES can be labelled as high: from the beginning, the Guidelines cried out for more participation, education and lifelong learning, entrepreneurship, adaptation to the changing environment and equal opportunities (under which heading reconciliation emerged) – all of this to achieve a higher employment rate. In doing so, the Guidelines addressed many of the tensions we relate to the labour market but less so those relating to family fluidity. Although reconciliation is often mentioned in the Guidelines – first as part of the equal-opportunity pillar, then as part of gender mainstreaming and more recently as part of quality of labour – the emphasis lies on achieving a higher participation rate by activating everyone between ages 25 and 65. Although it is not defined as such, activation is understood as people either working or involved in education or training that improves their employability. This more or less requires people to be either working or in training 24/7, and the care for and raising of children is delegated to formal institutions and services. Therefore the emphasis on activation will inevitably change and put a strain on family life. The effects of labour market policies on family life are however not found in the EES documents we analysed for this state-of-the-art paper.<sup>2</sup> The European Parliament Resolution on Reconciling Professional, Family and Private lives explicitly states that the best way to achieve reconciliation is to reduce working times (European Parliament, 2004, article 3)(24. European Parliament, 2004, article 3), but this statement has had no follow up in more recent documents. To map out the tensions we take a linear life-course perspective, starting with entry to the labour market and ending with retirement.

*Entry and unemployment*

Entry into the labour market and unemployment are intertwined and are perceived as major problems for the EU and its member states, especially when it concerns young people entering the labour market for the first time and those who want to re-enter after a period of inactivity. In the first EES Guidelines (Council of the European Union, 1998), recommendations were made to ensure a smooth transition from school to work and, if this failed, to prevent young people from becoming long-term unemployed. The long-term unemployed on the other hand have to be ushered back to the labour market through active measures that support the development of employability through work and training, rather than a disincentive to work through high unemployment benefits (e.g. Commission of the European Communities, 2003d; Council of the European Union, 1998). These recommendations for people (re-)entering the labour market and the long-term unemployed remained relevant up until the last fully-revised Guidelines for 2005 (which are in effect until 2008) (Council of the European Union, 2005a). Within this context we should mention that there has been a focus on the gender gap in employment and unemployment as well. A focus within the Guidelines has also been on the importance of training and education and the maintenance of the skills level of both the employed and the unemployed. Because the labour market has changed rapidly and a transition from an industrial- towards a service-based economy has set in, it is of the utmost importance to have the capacities and skills that the labour market demands. Especially in the review of the Lisbon process by the European Employment Taskforce and in the revised Guidelines for 2005-2008, it is stated that the skills level should be maintained and updated throughout the entire life course (Council of the European Union, 2005a; European Employment Taskforce, 2004). Also, there are frequent references (e.g. European Employment Taskforce, 2004) to the danger of outdated skills for older workers. If older people need to stay active in the labour market for a longer time, they must possess the necessary skills. To build and maintain skills that can keep a person in the labour market through her entire life, lifelong learning is considered to be very important (Council of the European Union, 1998; 1999c; 2000a; 2001a; 2002a; 2003a; 2005a). With regard to divorce, we already addressed the dangers of the unemployment and poverty traps. Benefits for the unemployed and otherwise inactive persons might provide disincentives to go to work, therefore member states were urged to reform their tax and benefit systems (see above p. 16) and (Commission of the European Communities, 2003b: 11). Furthermore, married and 'inactive' women can have difficulties maintaining their employability. In the annual European Commission report on equal opportunities for 2000 (Commission of the European Communities, 2001a), the Commission specifically states that employability measures should not focus only on benefits claimants, since this could exclude women who want to work but are not registered as unemployed and who therefore receive no benefits (apparently this happens only to women). When faced with a divorce, these women will have a rather big chance of getting trapped.

*Flexible jobs*

People who do manage to (re-)enter the labour market have a very real chance of becoming trapped in temporary jobs that provide little job security. Temporary jobs have a dual face: they are a necessary form of labour contract that helps solve friction problems of supply and demand in the labour market. Furthermore, they help enterprises to stay competitive (e.g. by making it possible to meet short-term demand for products by hiring more people) (Commission of the European Communities, 2006b); they provide opportunities for the unemployed to obtain work experience (Commission of the European Communities, 2006b; EMCO, 2002); and they can meet the needs of employees to reconcile work and private life, to take up education or training, or to prepare for retirement (Commission of the European Communities, 2006b; Council of the European Union, 1997a). On the other hand, people can get stuck in these temporary jobs. The same goes for flexible, fixed term and part-time jobs. Such jobs meet a need for both enterprises and employees, but they can entrap people (Commission of the European Communities, 2006b). Transferring from part-time to full-time work (or the other way around) in the same enterprise can be difficult. The EU and the social partners have recognised this problem and a Council directive has been issued that compels member states to implement the framework agreements between the social partners on part-time and fixed term work (Council of the European Union, 1997a; 1999b). For employees the danger of these three kinds of flexible jobs lies in the lack of security and opportunities for career development. There is a danger of segmentation of the labour market: employees in full-time and permanent jobs are usually better protected, and have better access to training and better career perspectives. Employees in part-time and especially temporary jobs are less protected, and have less access to training and hardly any career perspectives (Commission of the European Communities, 2001b; Council of the European Union, 1999b; 2002d; 2006c; EMCO, 2002). In the EES impact evaluation of 2002, five years after the start of this strategy, the communication summarising the evaluation explicitly refers to these downsides of flexible work (Commission of the European Communities, 2002b: 14). The synthetic report on Modernising Work Organisation refers to this problem by stating that flexible work is often perceived as a 'better-than-nothing-option', an alternative to unemployment and inactivity. Furthermore, the Eurobarometer survey of February /March 2002 is cited in which only one-third of those working under a fixed-term contract say they do so voluntarily (EMCO, 2002: 12). Therefore, the EES Guidelines and the JERs call for more security for employees (Commission of the European Communities, 1998; Council of the European Union, 1998; 1999a; 1999c; 2000a; 2000d; 2001a; 2001b; 2002a; 2003a; 2003b; 2004b; 2005a, 2005b; 2006c; 2007). In this way, the advantages of flexible, temporary and part-time jobs could be combined with protection of employees against these disadvantages (Council of the European Union, 1997a; 1998; 1999b; 1999c; 2000a; 2001a; 2002a; 2003a; 2005a).

*Self-employment*

The tensions that accompany self-employment are mentioned in the EESG documents, but once again rather implicitly. Self-employment is perceived as a way of creating more jobs ((Council of the European Union, 1998; 1999c; 2000a; 2001a;

2002a; 2003a; 2003b; 2005a) and as an opportunity for both employees and the unemployed. The tensions and barriers that accompany self-employment can however be deduced from the EES Guidelines, the JERs and the report of the European Employment Taskforce.

In the EES Guidelines, member states are urged to examine and reduce any obstacles that might exist to moving towards self-employment in tax and social security regimes (Council of the European Union, 1998; 1999c; 2000a; 2001a; 2002a) by removing administrative and regulatory burdens (Council of the European Union, 2003a). The current guidelines for 2005-2008 only refer to the necessity to support self-employment (Council of the European Union, 2005a). Other barriers for self-employment are implicitly recognised in the Joint Employment Reports: self-employment brings financial security risks, so the social protection systems should address this (Council of the European Union, 2004b; European Employment Taskforce, 2004: 31). Also, self-employment sometimes has a negative image (Council of the European Union, 2001b: 28). The older JERs, from 1998 to 2000, are more outspoken on self-employment. The 2000 JER specifically mentions the means to increase self-employment (and specifically links it to the young and unemployed) in member states: 'The means for encouraging people to become self-employed vary: raising entrepreneurial awareness through revised curricula, using closer links between business and schools, campaigns, competitions and specific programmes for women, disabled people and ethnic minorities/immigrants' (Council of the European Union, 2000d: 54). At the same time, this report is the only document that addresses the tensions most explicitly, by stating that self-employment (and working in micro-enterprises) has shortcomings in terms of working conditions such as working hours, pay, training and temporary contracts (Ibid., p. 55). The 1999 JER states that self-employment can serve as 'a solution for insertion into working life, particularly of people with the required skills and motivation', but also that for self-employment 'a supporting environment, including social protection and technical assistance and guidance is necessary' (Council of the European Union, 1999a: 61). Here too references are made to barriers for self-employment to be found in income security (Ibid., p. 63). Tensions with regard to family life or family fluidity are thus not explicitly mentioned in the OMC for employment.

#### *Retirement*

The tensions mentioned for retirement relate mainly to the affordability of pensions in particular and social protection systems in general, which are under pressure due to the changing demographic structure (Commission of the European Communities, 2000; 2003d; Council of the European Union, 2001c; High Level Group, 2004a). The demographic structure will lead to fewer people having to pay for the pensions of an increasing number of pensioners (Commission of the European Communities 2005a; 2005b; Council of the European Union, 2001a; 2002a; 2003a; 2005a). As we stated earlier, retirees regularly help out with the care for their grandchildren, offering support for their own children. This makes it easier for parents to keep working or start working again after parental leave (be it maternal or paternal), but it will also provide extra time for parents to work on their skills through education or training. From this perspective, the early retirement surge we

have seen in recent decades has probably contributed to the increase in numbers of working mothers, which is definitely positive. On the down side of early retirement there is the affordability issue. Within the EU this has been a primary cause of concern, outweighing the possible benefits that early retirement might have. To this end, once again as part of the Lisbon agenda, the EES documents have addressed the issue. Member states were urged to reform their tax and welfare systems in such a way so as to provide disincentives for early retirement and prevent the laying-off of elderly employees into unemployment without active measures to get them back into employment. The shift towards full participation of the elderly is rather new; in the 'EC Directive 97/81 on the framework agreement on part-time work' it was still stated that elderly employees should have the opportunity to use part-time work as a preparation for their retirement (Council of the European Union, 1997a: 13). Since 2001, the Guidelines address involuntary early retirement and refer to active aging, stating that to maintain relevance for the labour market, older employees will have to (be able to) update their skills, the societal attitude towards older employees will have to be curved, and member states should take measures to ensure that employers realise the potential of older employees (Council of the European Union, 2001a; 2002a; but see also Commission of the European Communities, 2005a; High Level Group, 2004a) and to encourage employers to hire older people (Council of the European Union, 2003a; High Level Group, 2004a). However, in the most recent Guidelines elderly employees themselves have to make sure that they stay attractive to the labour market. Employers no longer have a specific responsibility towards them, but do have to make sure that their enterprise remains adaptive to new situations (Council of the European Union, 2005a). For women, retirement brings a greater risk for poverty (Commission of the European Communities, 2002a: 26). In many member states women receive lower pensions than men, mainly because of the differences in employment history (Commission of the European Communities, 2002a: 85; 2003e: 12; 2004). Although the pension systems are under reform in most EU countries, the differences still persist.

#### *Interactions and life course*

Using EU-level documents on employment and social policy, we have distilled tensions of work and family life. The documents hardly mention these tensions. Earlier we stated that events in family life and work life can take place several times during the life course: partnerships and families can be formed and aborted several times; people might never become unemployed or spend a lifetime in and out of temporary jobs, work full-time all the time or take career breaks; they might be poorly educated or a living example of lifelong learning, go from rags to riches, from riches to rags, be entrapped in poverty (or wealth) forever, etc. Obviously, EU policies are not the place to describe all these events exhaustively, but there has been a focus on low-skilled and/or undereducated people who are in danger of becoming entrapped in periods of unemployment and temporary jobs without being able to make the transition to longer-term contracts or a more stable position in the labour market (EMCO, 2002; High Level Group, 2004b). With regard to flexibility and security, the Employment Guidelines call for – and the Council Directive 97/81 regulates – the rights of persons who want to switch between part-time and full-time

work (for whatever reason). It is only quite recently that the consequences of multiple changes of status in life and work during the life course were brought forward explicitly (Commission of the European Communities, 2003b; 2003d; 2005a; Council of the European Union, 2005a; European Employment Taskforce, 2004). In the Green paper 'Confronting demographic change', special reference is made to the non-linear careers that youth might have in the future: they might want to work harder during one life phase and take a career break to care for their children during another (Commission of the European Communities, 2005a).

One field that is subject to changing status of employees is mobility. The EU would like the labour force to be not only more active but also more mobile. Mobility could help improve EU competitiveness by making sure that the best-qualified employees for a job can easily be found when necessary. Mobility is perceived as crucial to the economic efficiency of the EU, and could make employers more flexible while making it possible for employees to go where their productivity and income are the highest (Commission of the European Communities, 2003d; High Level Group, 2004a; 2004b). Mobility could increase by removing barriers to changing professions (barriers are pay, pensions schemes), and by making sure that employees are willing to move to other regions in the country and the EU as a whole. Therefore it is of foremost importance that all employees be highly educated and skilled so that their base competencies are high, and that their education and qualifications are mutually recognised (Commission of the European Communities, 2003d; 2005b; Council of the European Union, 2003a; 2005a). The last life-course event that should be mentioned here is that the EU documents frequently mention lifelong learning as an important means towards attaining and maintaining the skills the labour market calls for (Commission of the European Communities, 2001c; Council of the European Union, 1998; 1999c; 2000a; 2000g; 2001a; 2003a; 2005a).

Based on the review of the documents on tensions arising from family fluidity and the flexible labour market, we can state that these tensions, and with them the reconciliation of work and family life, are heavily related to increasing participation and/or employment rates of mainly women. All calls for arrangements or measures to reconcile work and family life, and thus for a decrease in the tensions between them, explicitly refer to this. Reference is made only marginally to the need to balance men's and women's responsibilities for family life. Obviously this is not a new conclusion (e.g. Lewis, 2006), but it is remarkable that even though for a long time scholars and policymakers have called for balanced responsibilities, the actual attention for it in EU documents has declined over the years. We believe we can attribute this to the assumptions that underlie EU policy.

### **Assumptions in EU policy regarding reconciliation of work and family life**

The EU was established for economic and stability reasons, but despite growing attention for social issues the economic paradigm is still dominant. On the basis of Leeuw's methodology for program theory reconstruction, we distilled the assumptions underlying the documents analysed. We found that the dominant assumption in these documents is the firm belief that to be able to have a social charter and strive for social protection and inclusion, a strong and vibrant economy



is necessary. This is why achieving the Lisbon goals is considered to be of vital importance for all EU policies after 2000: 'At risk – in the medium to long run – is nothing less than the sustainability of the society Europe has built' (High Level Group, 2004a: 16). The EU economy is under strain and lacks competitiveness, especially compared with the US (Council of the European Union, 2000e; High Level Group, 2004a). To build a strong and resilient economy that can carry the burden of welfare states (social protection and inclusion systems, pensions), it is of the utmost importance that the overall employment rate increase. To achieve this at a time when the EU also faces the demographic pressure of an aging population and low fertility, everybody should be active in the labour market (and in the formal economy). To achieve full employment jobs need to be created, and this requires competitive enterprises and supporting tax and regulatory systems on the one hand, and an active labour market strategy on the other. This strategy should aim at getting people onto the labour market directly after graduation and preferably keeping them there until retirement (which should be no earlier than age 65). The assumption here is that to be able to attract and keep as many persons in the labour market it is necessary to provide incentives and remove disincentives. To this end, the EU called for and member states executed tax and benefit systems reform, and also provided care facilities. Furthermore, attention has been given to quality of labour and the reconciliation of professional and private life. Another assumption relevant to this paper is that to be able to compete in an open world economy, the European Union needs to make the transition towards a knowledge economy, hence the overall educational and skills level should rise.

The social policies are dominated by the assumptions that the social protection and benefit systems are fully depended on a sound economy and that the best way to protect citizens from poverty and social exclusion is for them to be active in the labour market (e.g. Commission of the European Communities, 2006a). Although the Lisbon goals became the focus of EU policies only in 2000, the underlying assumptions that the economy in the European Union needed reform were prevalent in earlier documents. Consequently, although the 1992 recommendation on childcare and the 1996 directive on parental leave (Council of the European Union, 1992; 1996) addressed employment rates and the possibilities of re-entering the labour market, the focus on the organisation of work was to contribute to reconciliation, equal opportunities and the balancing of responsibilities. Nowadays the organisation of work (including flexible jobs) contributes to employment rates primarily, with reconciliation taking a back seat.

Since Lisbon, and even more since the evaluation of the European Employment Strategy in 2002 (Commission of the European Communities, 2002b; 2003b) and the report of the High Level Group (2004a), these assumptions have been dominant. They also underlie the European Employment Strategy that already started in 1997 (Council of the European Union, 1997b), but the EES lacks the sense of urgency the Lisbon Council brought. In the EES Guidelines and other (social) policy documents before the kick-off of Lisbon, issues of reconciliation of work and welfare were first and foremost as a means to achieve equal opportunities for women and men, but also a goal by themselves. The same goes for equal opportunities: although this should be reached through the mainstreaming of gender in all EU policies

(Commission of the European Communities, 2006d), the focus on the Lisbon goals has shifted equal opportunities from being a goal to being a prerequisite for achieving full employment (see also Lewis, 2006). Another assumption to be found in the policies we analysed is that reconciliation can be reached by providing care services (see also Lewis, 2006). After Lisbon, reconciliation policies increasingly became a means, even an instrument to achieve the Lisbon goals: reconciliation policies should 'promote more favourable conditions for women and men to enter, re-enter and remain in the labour market' (Commission of the European Communities, 2003b: 15). The one-sidedness of the policies and the 'blind eye' for the influence of labour market developments on family life can thus be explained.

Finally, the present article shows common characteristics in newly defined social policy paradigms to confront new social risks. Each of the three analyzed paradigms takes a life-course perspective, promotes some way of risk-sharing and accentuates the importance of investing in or challenging human capital, and each pleads for re-commodification of those who are not yet involved in the labor market.

However, when looking into details, the three paradigms are quite diverse, and even compete to define the future of the European social model, especially the reconciliation of work and family life. They differ on problem definition, main policy goal, instruments and who is in charge. Moreover, the EU has not decided yet which one prevails; traces of all three policy goals are visible in its reconciliation policy. This seems in concordance with EU policies on this domain, which are usually made up of a compromise between the various approaches supported by the different member states.

If a choice has been made between the three paradigms will have to emerge from the various policies implemented at the national level though. This will be the subject of a next RECOWE paper, and an article that will be published in Social Politics (Knijn and Smit, 2009). From that analysis of the concrete policies, it will be shown that European policy mix is dominated by SI. Childcare will develop as well as protection for flexible work and temporary transitions between work, care and learning. It appears that many welfare regimes are hybridizing and slowly converging; this goes for the Scandinavian, EEC and Southern countries, but also for the UK and Ireland. Continental welfare regimes are tending toward a regime change in the direction of a social investment approach. This implies that current policy changes do not happen according to path-dependent adoption of the new social policy paradigm: if there were such a mechanism, Nordic countries should follow the social investment approach, corporatist countries the transitional labor market approach and liberal countries the life course approach, which is evidently not the case. Welfare regimes differences slowly wither away when new social risks are at stake. Finally, and in contrast to the EU-level reconciliation policy that fades away from gender equality, many member states are not giving up and are heavily preoccupied with the issue.

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<sup>1</sup> The Guidelines for 2003 are in effect for 2004 as well (Council of the European Union , 2004a); the Guidelines for 2005 are in effect until 2008 (Commission of the European Communities, 2006c; Council of the European Union , 2006a).

<sup>2</sup> Although they do emerge in the reports on equality between women and men; see above and appendix

## Appendix

### Overview of documents analysed

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